

town; the fields through which the King and his rebellious people passed have long been the site of the notorious slums of Whitechapel. The King conceded all. Nothing less than complete abolition of serfage throughout the land could satisfy the bulk of the rebels. The commutation of all servile dues for a rent of fourpence an acre put the reform on a practical basis. It would have been an excellent step towards the creation of a truly independent peasantry, such as has never been known in rural England. If the rent was too small, it could soon have been raised. But it is improbable that the King's advisers considered it seriously as a settlement. If they had, they would have haggled more over the terras. They regarded it only as a means of freeing themselves from the present situation, as John regarded Magna Charta, as Charles the First regarded the Petition of Right. Another concession, made in a similar spirit, was a general pardon to all concerned in the rebellion. As a further proof of his protection, Richard gave to the representatives of each county present a royal banner, under which they could henceforth march with the law on their side. Thirty clerks were at once set to work to draw up the charters of liberation and pardon in the proper legal form for every village and manor, as well as more generally for every shire. The exulting peasants then poured back into town through Aldgate, their King whom they had conquered in the midst. Freedom was theirs, and the dream of prosperity and good government. But there were many among them who understood the value of promises of State, and knew that all was still to win.¹

The last hope of real understanding and peace between the classes, if ever there had been any, was now extinguished by a tragic event. The rebels broke into the Tower. Authorities differ as to the exact moment, some place it during and some after the conference at Mile End. But it is unfortunately certain that no resistance was made by the very formidable body of well-armed soldiers, who might have defended such a stronghold for many days even against a picked army. The reason of this strange conduct is not clear. By one account, part of the King's agreement with the rebels had been that the Tower and the refugees it contained were to be de-

¹ *Mon. Eve.*, 27-8 ; *Froiss.*, ii. 471-2 ; *Higden*, ix. 3 ; *H~J5.*, 517.